



STORAGE

FAQ

Q What is eSATA and is it something that I should be using?

A Serial ATA (SATA) is a connection technology used to transfer data to and from storage devices, primarily hard disks. It has superseded the previous technology for doing this, which is called ATA, also known as IDE and Parallel ATA. SATA is on most motherboards and PCs released in the past couple of years.

SATA is mostly used by internal hard disks, while eSATA is a version of the SATA interface that can be used to connect an external hard disk to a computer. It's the same standard as SATA, but the external connectors have been designed to take more wear and tear and conform to electrical regulations for external devices. The main benefit of eSATA is that it's as fast as the internal standard (up to 300MB/s) and much faster than FireWire or USB Hi-Speed.

Unlike SATA, eSATA is not commonly found on most motherboards and PCs, though this is slowly changing. Most PCs can be upgraded with a PCI Card featuring several eSATA ports, although these can cost as much as £150 including VAT. Hard disk enclosures with eSATA connections start from £400 including VAT, and even the necessary cables can cost £20 including VAT. The expense of adding eSATA to a PC means it is a worthwhile option only for users who demand the extra performance, such as professional video editors.

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REVIEW FLASH DRIVE

SONY
MicroVault Pro 5GB

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £113 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.sony.co.uk

The MicroVault is a portable USB flash drive that contains a 5GB 1.8" hard disk.

It's roughly the size of two Zippo lighters. The USB connector swivels out of the top of the unit. As the MicroVault is quite thick, an extension cable would have been handy.

It comes loaded with a basic but competent utility for backing up your files automatically. The software can save multiple versions, in case you need an older version of a file later. In our big files test, the MicroVault wrote at 6.30MB/s and read at 11.67MB/s. In the small files test, the drive wrote at 0.11MB/s and read at 6.49MB/s. This is about what we would expect of a 1.8" disk.

Unfortunately for Sony, Seagate's 5GB USB2 Pocket Hard Drive, reviewed in our external storage Labs test in *Shopper* June 2005, is comparable in size and performance and costs £40 less. And if size isn't an issue, you can get Western Digital's Passport 80GB drive for just £98 including VAT. By comparison, the MicroVault isn't very good value.

Alan Lu



✓ Sturdy construction; smart appearance

✗ Expensive

SPECIFICATIONS 5GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed, USB powered. Part code USD5G

REVIEW DVD WRITER

LITE-ON
EZ-DUB SOHW-1673SU

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £65 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cclonline.comDETAILS www.liteonit.com

This drive has been designed to make writing your own DVDs even easier.

The File button writes any files dropped on the EZ-DUB software application to disc and the Dub button copies an existing disc. It works well, but it's only a little easier to use than standard DVD software.

The EZ-DUB is also supplied with a copy of Nero. Using the Dub button, a DVD was copied in 10 minutes and 37 seconds; Nero did the same task in eight minutes and 38 seconds. Using Nero, the drive had an average DVD+R performance, writing a disc in just under six minutes and a DVD-R in six minutes, 25 seconds. Double-layer performance was poor; it took 27 minutes and 29 seconds to fill a DVD+R DL disc.

The extra buttons make it only slightly easier to use than other drives, so we suggest you opt for LG's GSA-2166D.

Alan Lu



✓ Simple to use

✗ Buttons could be more descriptively labelled; average performance

SPECIFICATIONS 16X DVD-R, 16X DVD+R, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 48X CD-R, 24X CD-RW, USB Hi-Speed connection. Part code SOHW-1673SU

HOTLIST PORTABLE HARD DISK

WESTERN DIGITAL
Passport 80GB

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £98 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.wdc.com

Western Digital's rubber-bottomed Passport is an excellent portable disk. It's a little bigger than a PDA and weighs just 238g, so it's easy to carry around. Inside is a 2½" hard disk that provides 80GB of storage. It connects via USB Hi-Speed and provides the kind of transfer speeds usual for such a disk; large files transfer at around 22MB/s and small files at 7MB/s. It's ideal as a second notebook hard disk or as portable file storage.



SPECIFICATIONS 80GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed interface, USB powered. Part code WDXML800UETE

HOTLIST INTERNAL HARD DISK

SAMSUNG
SpinPoint SP2504C

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £79 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.ukDETAILS www.samsung.com

Samsung's SpinPoint SP2504C was the best hard disk in our recent Labs test (*Shopper* September 2005). It combines good value with cutting-edge technology. Its 250GB of storage is accessed through a SATA II interface with Native Command Queuing at a maximum transfer rate of 300MB/s. If you're looking for more internal storage and you have a free SATA connector, this is the drive to buy.



SPECIFICATIONS 3½" internal hard disk, 250GB capacity, 232GB formatted capacity (NTFS), SATA 300 interface, 7,200rpm spindle speed, 8MB cache. Part code SP2504C

HOTLIST DISK CADDY

ICYBOX
IB-360

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £23 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.overclockers.co.ukDETAILS www.raidsonic.de

If you have a spare IDE hard disk lying around, IcyBox's IB-360 caddy can turn it into an external disk. It's attractive to look at and connects via USB Hi-Speed. Performance using a spare hard disk is good and in line with purpose-built external hard disks. It's good value.



SPECIFICATIONS External hard disk caddy, external power supply, USB Hi-Speed interface, PATA hard disk interface. Part code IB-360U-BL